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Guinea Officials Surrender as Junta Chief Claims Presidency

BY ADMIN December 25, 2008 at 12:20 PM EST



Guinea coup leader Moussa Camara on TV; AP photo

Camara led a military faction that seized power Tuesday after the death of President Lansana Conte. Conte ruled the country for 24 years and died Monday after a long illness.

Prime Minister Ahmed Tidiane Souare told Camara on a live radio broadcast: "We are at your disposal." The government leaders were then free to leave, reported private radio station Liberte FM, according to the Associated Press.

Souare had not been seen in public since Camara's group of junior officers declared a coup Tuesday, though he had said the following day that he was still in charge.

On Wednesday, crowds cheered Camara on the streets of the country's capital Conakry as a military convoy proceeded to the presidential palace.

Camara has declared himself the country's interim leader and said presidential elections will be held in 2010. He said on radio broadcasts that he has no intention of running but that his group wanted to re-establish order in Guinea.

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Under Guinea's constitution, Parliament leader Aboubacar Sompore had been the next in line for the presidency, according to the AP.

Though many people in Conakry said they supported the coup and were ready for a change, some expressed concern about Camara's group.

"We are all worried. Although I'm a little bit happy, I'm mostly anxious," said Yahya Sako, a radio and TV repairman in the northern town of Siguiri, reported the AP. "Are these military people going to continue to hold on to power?"

Guinea has a population of about 10 million and is the world's largest exporter of bauxite, which is used to make aluminum.

The country also has gold, diamond and iron ore deposits. Despite the natural resources, Guinea's economy has deteriorated over the years and now its population is among the world's poorest.

Guinea has never had a democratic transfer of power. Conte took power in a 1984 military coup from Guinea's first president, Ahmed Sekou Toure.

A state funeral is planned for Conte on Friday, according to the Agence France-Presse.

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